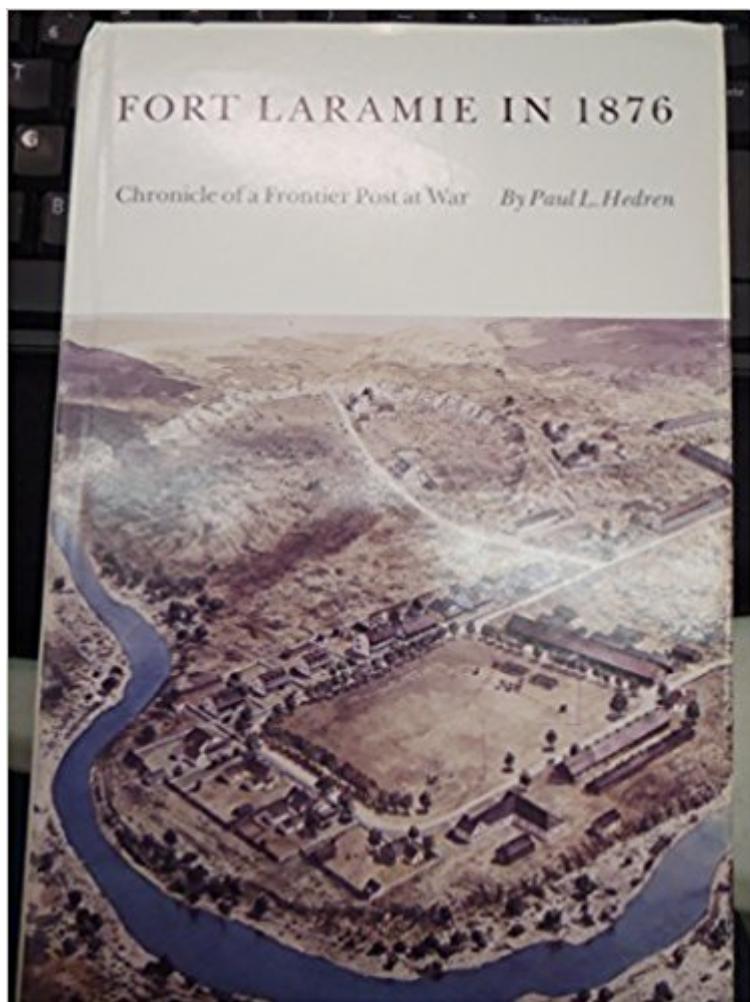


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Fort Laramie In 1876: Chronicle Of A Frontier Post At War



Synopsis

Fort Laramie had a long and illustrious history as a way station on the Oregon Trail, trading center, rendezvous point, Indian agency, and military installation. Founded in 1834 on the high plains of present-day eastern Wyoming, the fort evolved into an organizational hub and chief supply center for the U.S. Army in its campaigns against the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. Fort Laramie in 1876 focuses on a crucial year in the history of the fort, a year that saw General George Crook's Big Horn, Yellowstone, and Powder River expeditions; the defeat of Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer at the Little Big Horn; a fevered rush to the Black Hills gold fields; and chaos at the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Indian agencies. Many historians have written about these events, but Paul L. Hedren is the first to dwell on the operations of the most important military post on the northern plains during that time. He has drawn on the official army records of Fort Laramie—“a vast body of correspondence, orders, and directives from all command levels”—in addition to diaries and journals. Collectively, they illuminate the scene of a frontier military outpost making history in its support of General Crook in the Great Sioux War.

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Customer Reviews

Paul L. Hedren is National Park Service Superintendent at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota. His works include *With Crook in the Black Hills*: Stanley J. Morrow's 1876 Photographic Legacy (1985) and *First Scalp for Custer: The Skirmish at Warbonnet Creek, Nebraska, July 17, 1876* (1980; a Bison Book).

Frontier historians have long been appreciative of the importance of Fort Laramie, at the confluence of the North Platte and Laramie rivers in present-day Wyoming, as a frontier outpost. Established in 1834 to support the fur trade, the fort had become by the 1850s a key post in the U. S. Army's logistical system and an important center for the orderly movement of settlers on the frontier. The troops at the post were involved in most of the major campaigns fought against the Indians of the northern Great Plains, until the post's inactivation in 1890. Paul L. Hedren, superintendent of the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site here presents an impressive study of the role of Fort Laramie in the Sioux Indian War of 1876-1877, as the episode that broke the back of the Plains Indians. Using Fort Laramie as the backdrop from which to discuss this important episode in American history, Hedren analyzes in lively fashion the Big Horn, Yellowstone, and Powder River expeditions against the Sioux conducted by Gen. George Crook. There is also comment on Custer's defeat at the Little Bighorn, the gold rush into the Black Hills, and the general discord of the Indians at the various agencies. But "Fort Laramie in 1876" is more than a recitation of the events of the Sioux Indian War. Many other historians have told that story over the years, and if Hedren had limited his book to the war I would have questioned the necessity of its publication. Instead, Hedren recognizes the army post for what it was, the most important installation on the northern plains and the critical site from which the army's campaign against the Sioux was both orchestrated and supplied. While the author's narrative ranges from Omaha, the headquarters of the army's Department of the Platte, to the campaigns in Montana and the escape of some of the Sioux into Canada. Hedren's focus is always on Fort Laramie and its contributions to the war in terms of personnel, equipment, commanders, communications, and logistics. Hedren is the first to draw on the large body of material relating to the operation of the post contained in the National Archives, particularly Record Group 393; the extensive collection of primary materials at the U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; and documents at the U.S. Military Academy Library at West Point. The result is impressive. Fort Laramie in 1876 captures the essence of the military outpost at war. It is an excellent companion volume and deserves a place on the shelf of all serious students of the American West and the Indian wars.

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